

# Introducing Wisconsin



Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau

## *Introducing Wisconsin*

*Text by Richard Roe*

*Graphic Design by Kathleen Sitter*

*Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau*

*100 N. Hamilton St., P.O. Box 2037*

*Madison, WI 53701-2037*

*Reference Phone: (608) 266-0342*

*Internet Address: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb>*

### *Photo Credits:*

*Cover: Monona Terrace-City of Madison,*

*Pheasant, Wind Sail-Wisconsin Department of Tourism,*

*All Others-Kathleen Sitter, LRB*

*Pages 1, 2 (top), 3, 4, 6, 7 (bottom) Wisconsin Department of Tourism*

*Page 2 (bottom) Timothy Hursley ©, Milwaukee Art Museum*

*Pages 5, 7 (top) Kathleen Sitter, LRB*

*Page 8 State Historical Society of Wisconsin*

*Revised May 2002*



Wisconsin is known both as the Badger State and as America's Dairyland. The word "Wisconsin" appears to be the French version of an Indian word that may have meant gathering of the waters, wild rice country, or homeland. The badger nickname comes from the industrious lead miners of the early 1800s, who, like the feisty critter, burrowed into hillside caves, rather than taking time to build houses.

Wisconsin is not only a leading producer of dairy products, but of field crops, such as corn and hay, vegetables, and fruits. In addition, the state is a leader in the manufacture of machinery, food, and paper.

With its many lakes, woodlands, and parks, Wisconsin provides plenty of opportunities for outdoor recreation. Boating, fishing, and hunting are popular activities as well as camping, hiking, and horseback riding. In winter, skiing, ice fishing, and snowmobiling take center stage.

Wisconsin is known for its progressive politics. The Wisconsin Legislature has led the way in enacting laws providing for teacher pensions, worker's compensation, and vocational education.



## Geography

Wisconsin is part of the north central region of the United States. Its neighboring states are Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota. Also known as a Great Lakes state, Wisconsin's boundaries include Lake Michigan to the east and Lake Superior on the north. The Mississippi and St. Croix rivers mark the state's western boundaries.

As recently as 10,000 years ago, much of Wisconsin was covered by glacial ice. The advance and retreat of glaciers created the Great Lakes and also left Wisconsin with one of the highest concentrations of fresh water lakes in the world, largely in the north. More than 14,000 lakes dot the state. The state abounds in common glacial features, such as drumlins, eskers, till plains, marshes, kettles, and moraines. The Kettle Moraine State Forest, stretching for miles across southeastern Wisconsin, is a prominent reminder of glaciation. The glaciers did not cover southwestern Wisconsin. As a result, this area is marked by steep-sided ridges and deep valleys.

Wisconsin ranks 22nd in size among the 50 states with a surface area of 65,499 square miles,



including 1,831 square miles of inland lakes and the 9,355 miles of water area covered by Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. The state encompasses a varied topography of rolling hills, valleys, ridges, lakes, and shoreline, but its highest elevation is under 2,000 feet (Timms Hill at 1,952 feet).

Despite the logging boom of the second half of the 19th century, forests still cover more than 40% of the state. In the south, maple, oak, and aspen are among the dominant species. In the northern regions, birch and softwoods, such as red pine, white pine, balsam fir, and jack pine predominate.

Wisconsin's growing season averages range from 100 days in the northern part of the state to 175 days along the southern Lake Michigan shore. Average temperatures vary statewide from 12.4° Fahrenheit in January to 69.4° in July. The average statewide precipitation is 31.79 inches.

## Population and People

Wisconsin's 2000 population, according to the U.S. Census, totaled 5,363,675, a 9.6% increase over the 1990 count of 4,891,769. Wisconsin ranks 18th among the states.

More than 65% of the population is considered urban. Most of the urban population is concentrated in the southeastern part of the state and the Fox River and Lake Winnebago areas. The most populous county is Milwaukee and the least populous is Menominee. Three cities, Milwaukee, Madison, and Green Bay, have 100,000 or more residents.

In 2000, the state's population was 88.9% white, 5.7% Black, 1.7% Asian, and 0.9% Native American. Hispanics make up 3.6% of the state's population. More than 50% of the state's residents identify themselves as having German ancestry.



## Economy

To a greater degree than most states, Wisconsin's economy has relied on a combination of manufacturing and agriculture as a basis for its prosperity. The state's abundant natural resources and skilled labor force have led to the development of these sectors. In the 1990s, however, service industries took over as the employers of the largest number of workers.





## Manufacturing

Wisconsin's diverse manufacturing sector employs more than 600,000 of the state's 2.8 million workers. In 2000, manufacturing accounted for more than 25% of the state's earned income, ranking Wisconsin third nationally in percentage of income earned from manufacturing. Three-fifths of manufacturing employees work on durable goods.

The southeastern part of the state, especially Milwaukee, Waukesha, Racine, and Kenosha Counties, is noted for its high concentration of manufacturing employment, while the paper production, food processing, and machinery industries form another manufacturing concentration in Sheboygan, Fond du Lac, Winnebago, and Manitowoc Counties. Among the well-known goods produced by Wisconsin manufacturers are motorcycles, farm tractors, snowmobiles, boats and outboard motors, earth-moving machinery, paper, wax and polishes, and overalls.

## Agriculture

"America's Dairyland" ranks second in number of milk cows and milk production and first in production of cheese. Dairy products account for more than 50% of Wisconsin farm cash receipts. Overall, Wisconsin ranks 10th in the United States in farm marketing receipts.

Its farms produce a diversity of crops related to the state's climate and topography. The rolling hills in the southern parts of the state dictate the use of a large amount of land for pasture. The flatter terrain in the central area allows production of feed grains and vegetable crops. The short growing season in the north makes forestry its major agricultural activity. Marshland in various regions is especially adaptable for cranberry bogs.

Wisconsin is the nation's number one producer of corn for silage, cranberries, beets for canning, cabbage for kraut, snap beans for processing, and oats. Its other leading crops include green peas, sweet corn, potatoes, cucumbers for pickles, carrots, tart cherries, and mint oil.



## Other Industries

Tourism is also one of Wisconsin's leading industries. It contributes more than \$7 billion to the state's economy and is responsible for over 100,000 jobs. A third of all tourists are Wisconsin residents; nearly half come from the four states bordering Wisconsin.

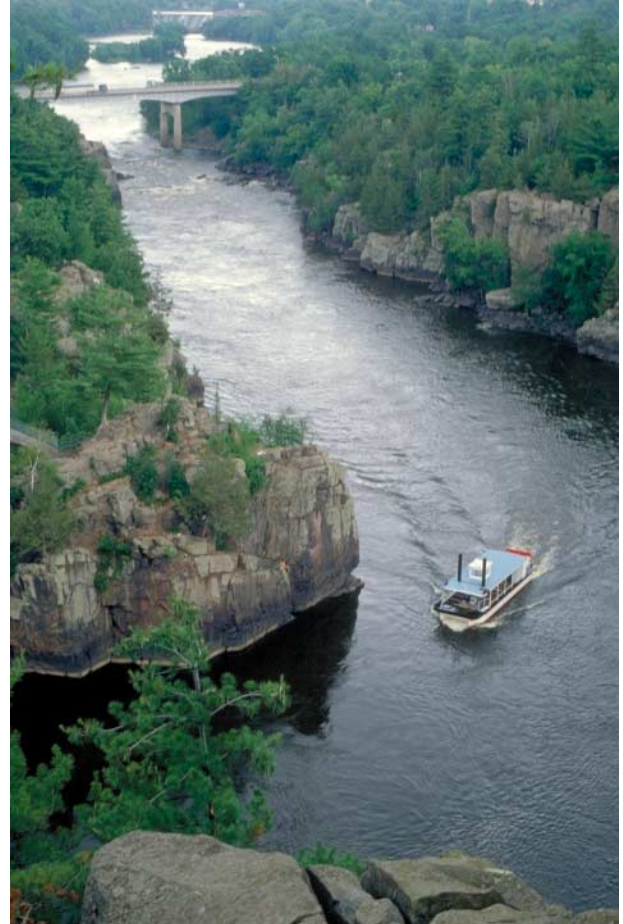
Service industry employees account for over 25% of the state's civilian labor force, putting Wisconsin in the bottom third of all states for reliance on service industries for jobs. The largest service employers are business services, including advertising and data processing, and health services.

## Transportation

Wisconsin's diverse transportation network includes nearly 112,000 miles of roads and highways with over 4.7 million registered motor vehicles, over 3,500 road miles of railroad track, 9 public airports serving scheduled flights, and shipping on the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. More than 20 cities have public bus systems.

The 12 railroads operating in Wisconsin carried freight totaling more than 21 million ton-miles (i.e., a ton of cargo moved a mile) in 2000. In addition, Amtrak service in the state carries more than 145,000 passengers. Airlines operating in Wisconsin serve over 4.6 million passengers and carry more than 11,000 tons of cargo.

Lake Superior and Lake Michigan ports handle about 48 million tons of freight, more than 85% of it at Superior, one of the world's largest grain ports. Much of the rest is handled by ports in Milwaukee and Green Bay. In addition, a great deal of freight is shipped from or delivered to Wisconsin by Mississippi River barge.



## Government

### State Capital: Madison

The Wisconsin Constitution establishes the framework for the three branches of government — legislative, executive, and judicial. It also guarantees the liberties of the people through a “Declaration of Rights,” creates elected state offices, provides for a system of local government, and includes provisions for state finance and public education. The constitution was ratified by the voters on March 13, 1848, and Wisconsin subsequently became the Union's 30th state on May 29, 1848.



## Legislative Branch

The legislature is divided into two houses: the senate with 33 members and the assembly with 99 members. Senators are elected to four-year terms; representatives to the assembly are elected to two-year terms. The legislature operates on a biennial (two-year) basis, beginning in January of the odd-numbered year. The legislature establishes its own schedule, which alternates between floor periods and committee work periods.

The senate and assembly elect their own officers from their membership.

The presiding officer of the senate is the president; in the assembly it is the speaker. Each house appoints a number of committees. Nearly every bill (proposed law) is assigned to a committee before it can be considered by the entire body for possible enactment into law.



## Executive Branch

The governor is the state's chief executive officer and is elected to a four-year term. The governor appoints the heads of most executive agencies and numerous state commissions, boards, and councils. In addition, the governor has the power to grant pardons, develop the state budget, and veto bills in their entirety, or in part, if the bill contains an appropriation. The legislature may override a veto only if two-thirds of the members of both houses agree.

The lieutenant governor succeeds the governor if the chief executive dies, resigns, or is removed from office. Other constitutional officers include the secretary of state, state treasurer, attorney general, and superintendent of public instruction, all of whom are elected to four-year terms.



The various state agencies regulate the trade of goods and services; protect consumers; oversee the state's educational institutions; protect the environment; regulate public utilities; assist workers; plan and develop transportation networks; and protect the health, welfare, and safety of Wisconsin citizens.

## Judicial Branch

The judiciary consists of a supreme court, court of appeals,

and circuit courts. Local governments may create municipal courts to enforce local ordinances. Wisconsin judges are elected on nonpartisan ballots. The seven supreme court justices serve 10-year terms and court of appeals and circuit court judges serve six-year terms. All judges except municipal court judges must be attorneys.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court is the final authority on state constitutional questions and is the highest tribunal for all cases begun in the state, except those that involve a federal issue. It also supervises the judicial system. The court of appeals, which is divided into four districts, hears cases on appeal from circuit courts.

The circuit courts are Wisconsin's trial courts for both civil and criminal cases. Each circuit is a single county, with the exception of three circuits that serve two counties each. Where judicial caseloads are heavy, a circuit may have several branches.

Cities, villages, and towns may establish municipal courts that hear cases that involve violations of municipal ordinances having monetary penalties. Municipal judges serve terms set by local ordinance, usually two to four years.



## Local Government

Local units of government in Wisconsin consist of 72 counties, 190 cities, 395 villages, and 1,265 towns. In addition, the state has 428 school districts, 16 technical college districts, and numerous special districts (such as metropolitan sewerage districts, lake rehabilitation districts, and community development authorities). These local units of government have the power to levy taxes.

**Counties.** Counties are governed by an elected board of supervisors. Counties either elect a county executive to serve as an administrator or the board appoints an administrator or

coordinator. Other elected county officials include the district attorney, sheriff, clerk, treasurer, clerk of circuit court, coroner, and surveyor. Some counties have opted to appoint a medical examiner or a registered land surveyor to replace the latter two offices.

**Cities and Villages.** Developed areas may incorporate as cities or villages. Most cities are governed by an elected common council and an elected mayor. A few cities elect a common council and appoint a city manager instead of electing a mayor. Other elected city officials include the clerk and treasurer.

Most Wisconsin villages elect a board of trustees and a board president. A few villages elect a board but appoint a manager. Other elected village officials typically include the clerk, treasurer, assessor, and constable.

**Towns.** Areas that are not incorporated are called towns. They are governed by a town board, usually composed of three supervisors, and one of them is elected town board chairperson. Towns with larger populations may have five supervisors. Boards are elected every two years at a town meeting in which all voters of the town can participate. Other town officers include the clerk, treasurer, and assessor.



## Education

Wisconsin's first public school opened its doors in 1845. The state's constitution provides for the establishment of district schools "free and without charge for tuition to all children between the ages of 4 and 20 years." It also created a State Superintendent to supervise public education. Today,



Wisconsin is divided into 428 public school districts, each governed by an elected board. Wisconsin's public schools serve nearly 880,000 students.

The constitution also directs the establishment of a state university "at or near the seat of state government." Classes at the University of Wisconsin (Madison) began in 1849. The University of Wisconsin System consists of 13 university campuses, 13 two-year colleges, and statewide extension services. The UW System enrolls nearly 157,000 students, while the extension enrolls nearly 161,000 in continuing education courses.

Wisconsin was the first state to establish state support for vocational education in 1911. The Technical College System serves more than 453,000 students in 16 districts covering the entire state. A state board coordinates the system. Each district is governed by its own board.

Wisconsin is also home to a number of private educational institutions. Private elementary and secondary schools enroll about 148,000 students, and another 21,000 are home schooled. In addition,

the state has 29 private higher educational institutions that enroll over 53,000 students. Two Indian tribes have established public community colleges supported entirely by local funding.

## Conservation

The state's outdoor recreation, environmental protection, and resource renewal programs benefit Wisconsin's residents and visitors from other states. Wisconsin residents purchase more than 500,000 hunting licenses and a similar number of fishing licenses annually. The state registers over 550,000 boats and 200,000 snowmobiles. Much emphasis is placed on stocking fish and game, planting trees, and protecting endangered wildlife and plants.

Wisconsin's commitment to the preservation of the state's natural and historical



heritage is evidenced by its 43 state parks, 12 state forests, numerous state trails, and historic sites. The first state park was created in 1900, and the first state forest was established in 1907. State-owned historic sites in Wisconsin draw more than 300,000 visitors per year. The sites illustrate Wisconsin's pioneer and ethnic heritage.

## History

The first people to reach the land that now comprises Wisconsin were nomadic bands of Indians who supported themselves by hunting and fishing. The area was subsequently peopled by a succession of woodland culture Indians who practiced agriculture and whose burial mounds are still much in evidence. Indians still held nearly all of Wisconsin in the 1820s. Between 1829 and 1842 they were forced to relinquish all but a few reserves.



The first Europeans to arrive in Wisconsin were the French, led by explorer Jean Nicolet in 1634. Wisconsin remained under the influence of French fur traders until 1763, when the British took control after winning the French and Indian War. When the Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War, the new American government gained possession of the territory. Wisconsin was initially governed by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and it remained a territory until May 29, 1848, when it became the nation's 30th state.

The fur trade dominated Wisconsin's economy until the early 1800s when lead mining became important. With the influx of settlers in the late 1830s and the 1840s, farming assumed much greater importance, and wheat was the leading crop until the 1870s. In the 1880s, dairying became a critical part of the farm economy. Lumbering was of special importance from

1850 to 1900. Early manufacturing in Wisconsin reflected the state's natural assets and the importance of agriculture. It included milling, shipping, brewing, manufacture of farm implements, and, somewhat later, papermaking, meat processing, and metal working.

Wisconsin is considered the birthplace of the Republican Party and the progressive movement. The Republicans supplanted the Whig Party largely because of the slavery issue. They came to power in 1857 and remained the state's dominant party for much of the next 100 years. Until 1857, the Democrats had been the dominant party.

The progressive movement in Wisconsin grew out of the Republican Party. With his election as governor in 1900,





Robert M. La Follette became the leading figure in Wisconsin politics for the next 24 years. He and his successors gave the state many innovations in government, including direct primary elections, building codes, and an income tax. In the 1930s, the progressives, under Philip La Follette, left the Republicans and formed their own party. The Progressive Party won the governor's office three times between 1933 and 1943.

After World War II, the Progressive Party disbanded, many returning to the Republican Party. Some of the younger progressives joined the Democratic Party and played a key role in making it an important player in Wisconsin politics. By the late 1950s, Wisconsin had become a competitive two-party state, and has remained one since that time.

## For More Information

The *Wisconsin Blue Book* is a principal source of information about our state. The current edition is available at school and public libraries and on the Internet at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb/bb/index.html>.

The *Blue Book* contains brief biographies of elected state officials; profiles of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of state government; descriptions of state agencies; and Wisconsin statistical data.

The Legislative Reference Bureau publishes the *Blue Book* and informational reports on legislative topics. Contact the LRB at (608) 266-0342 or via the Internet address at <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/lrb>.

State agencies issue biennial reports on their operations and papers on subjects related to their duties. These reports and papers are often available on the Internet. Wisconsin state government's Internet address is <http://www.wisconsin.gov/state/home>. The legislature's address is <http://www.legis.state.wi.us>.

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin is an outstanding source of information on Wisconsin history. The Society has published a six-volume history of the state and has many resources for students. Its Internet address is <http://www.shsw.wisc.edu>.

## Wisconsin State Symbols

State nickname	Badger State (unofficial)	State symbol of peace	Mourning Dove
State motto	"Forward"	State domestic animal	Dairy Cow
State bird	Robin	State insect	Honey Bee
State flower	Wood Violet	State soil	Antigo Silt Loam
State tree	Sugar Maple	State fossil	Trilobite
State fish	Muskellunge	State dog	American Water Spaniel
State beverage	Milk	State wildlife animal	White-tailed Deer
State animal	Badger	State dance	Polka
State grain	Corn	State song	"On, Wisconsin!"
State mineral	Galena	State waltz	"The Wisconsin Waltz"
State rock	Red Granite	State ballad	"Oh Wisconsin, Land of My Dreams"



***Sugar Maple***  
STATE TREE



***State Flag***



***Badger***  
STATE ANIMAL



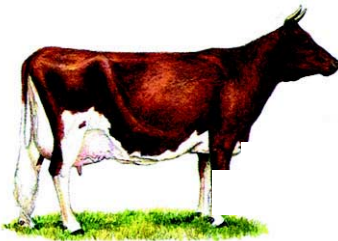
***Robin***  
STATE BIRD



***Honey Bee***  
STATE INSECT



***American Water Spaniel***  
STATE DOG



***Dairy Cow***  
STATE DOMESTICATED ANIMAL



***Muskellunge***  
STATE FISH



***Red Granite***  
STATE ROCK



***Milk***  
STATE BEVERAGE



***White-tailed Deer***  
STATE WILDLIFE ANIMAL



***Wood Violet***  
STATE FLOWER



***Antigo Silt Loam***  
STATE SOIL



***Corn***  
STATE GRAIN



***Trilobite***  
STATE FOSSIL



***Galena***  
STATE MINERAL



***Mourning Dove***  
SYMBOL OF PEACE



***Polka***  
STATE DANCE